

SOLIDARITY

The Trade Union Magazine

Campaigning to break the unions from 'Social Partnership'



£1

Issue 13 January - March 2005

Cross union action to defend public sector pensions?

Global Solidarity not 'social globalisation' Assessment of the Firefighters' dispute

European Constitution Bolkestein Directive

Iraqi Trade Union delegation.

US Carpenters for a rank and file union Debate on the future of US unions

Israeli state attack on Workers Advice Center COSATU-ANC row over Zimbabwe

Unions should oppose ID cards

SOLIDARITY

A publication for union members and activists, campaigning in the Trades Unions for:

- A break from the 'social partnership' approach which ties the unions to the coat-tails of the employers.
- A 'new unionism' which opposes subordination to the 'global market' and campaigns for a practical working class internationalism, building on the experience of the Liverpool dockers.
- Opposition to privatisation, whether outright, or in the form of PFI or PPP, and popularisation of the idea of social ownership.
- A trades unionism which, whilst fighting to improve working conditions and wages, breaks with the narrow workplace concerns of 'non-political' trade unionism, and fights for the interests of the working class and oppressed as a whole.
- Repeal of all anti-union legislation and an end to state interference into the unions.
- An end to all bureaucratic privileges and control of the unions.

Editor: Martin Wicks

E-mail articles (Word or rich text files) to :
solidarity@btinternet.com
Or post to:

SOLIDARITY, PO Box 1219, Swindon SN3 2WA

Website:

http://uk.geocities.com/solidarity_magazine

Circulation/Publicity: Sarah Friday

All Cheques payable to SOLIDARITY

Organisations sponsoring Solidarity:

Berwick TUC, Bracknell Amicus, Bridgend RMT, Bridgwater TUC, Bristol RMT, Central London Amicus, CWU Scotland No 2 Branch, CWU Liverpool Amalgamated Branch, Derby Rail & Engineering RMT, Islington UNISON Local Government Branch, Lancaster & Morecombe TUC, Oxford TUC, PCSU Employment Services London Region, PCSU Socialist Caucus, Socialist Outlook, Scottish Federation of Socialist Teachers, Scottish Socialist Party, Socialist Solidarity Network, Swindon RMT, Swindon TUC, Trent General Amicus, Waterloo RMT

Subscriptions

£6 for 4 issues £10 for international subs

Standing Orders

Help support SOLIDARITY and our campaigning work by taking out a standing order for £2, £5, (more if you can afford it) per month. You will receive a copy of the magazine plus occasional Newsletters which we produce.

Included in this Issue

Editorial

Global Solidarity not 'social globalisation'

Page 3

Cross union action to defend public sector pensions?

Pages 4 - 5

Martin Wicks examines the pensions crisis and the response of the unions

FBU: our members deserved better

Pages 6 - 7

Paul Embry gives his personal assessment of the Firefighters' dispute

Phoenix rising from the ashes?

Page 7

After the banning of Grassroots FBU a new rank and file bulletin is launched

Trades Unionists for another Europe

Page 8

An appeal for a trade union campaign against the European Constitution

'A threat to rights, services and democracy'

Page 9

RMT President Tony Donaghey explains the union's view on the European Constitution

Bolkestein Directive

Page 9

An EU Directive on Services in the Internal Market threatens not only public services but Health & Safety regulations as well

'Repeal the 1987 Labour Laws'

Pages 10 - 11

Alex Gordon interviews a delegation of Iraqi trades unionists

Carpenters for a rank and file union

Page 12

A rank and file carpenters movement in Chicago

Debate on the future of US unions

Page 13

The continued decline of the US unions has produced a debate on how the decline can be reversed

Israeli authorities seek to dismantle WAC

Pages 14 - 15

The Israeli state is threatening to close down the Israeli Workers Advice Center - an international campaign in support of WAC has been launched

Behind the COSATU-ANC row over Zimbabwe

Pages 16-17

We reproduce COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi's response to an ANC attack on the federation's delegation to Zimbabwe. This dispute has raised sharp differences in relation to policy in South Africa within the Alliance.

Union News

Pages 18-19

Unions should oppose ID Cards

Page 20

Jon Rogers calls for the unions to campaign against the introduction of ID cards

Signed articles do not necessarily express the point of view of SOLIDARITY

Global Solidarity not "social globalisation"

You haven't heard about the Congress of the International Confederation of Free Trades Unions taking place recently? Hardly anybody has. Yet the ICFTU Congress has been announced as a big step forward for the international labour movement. The ICFTU is merging with the WCL, a "Christian" federation. The main document of this august gathering had the very radical sounding title of 'Globalising Solidarity'. ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder said: "We can only turn the tide if we have the vision, services, and methods that would enable national trade unions to engage in international action on the required scale and with the necessary purpose."

But what purpose? To challenge globalization? No, to 'transform' it: that is "to harness its potential for all" and to "eliminate its downside". Or as Sharon Burrows from the Australian ACTU said towards the end of the Congress, their goal was "decent globalization". Brendan Barber of the TUC calls it "social globalization that works for people rather than the other way round".

'Globalising Solidarity' sums up the outlook of the ICFTU, of its 'vision' on trades unionism, thus:

"If there is a simple definition of the historic mission of trade unionism, it would be the struggle to impose regulation and control on the operation of markets so that they yield socially acceptable outcomes, with protection of the rights, interests, and security of working people."

In other words it wants a 'humane' capitalism rather than struggling for a new society. Hence despite all the words expended in relation to "new trade union internationalism", the main emphasis of this international bureaucratic structure has been on convincing international bodies of 'social' rules of 'governance' of globalisation, a sort of international Queensbury Rules of global capitalism. This is like Red Riding Hood striving to teach good manners to the wolf.

Apart from a few minor amendments, all the resolutions were duly passed, most unanimously. Yet most of the unions remain wedded to a national outlook rather than an international one. This is reflected by the approach of the American AFL-CIO to the exodus of 'American jobs' to China. Mr Sweeney and his cohorts, in the spring of 2004, filed a petition with the US Trade Representative, charging that China was enjoying 'unfair trade advantages' that were not allowed under US Trade Law. These supporters of 'global solidarity' asserted that Section 301(d) of the 1974 Trade Act should be used to rectify this unfair advantage in trade resulting from China's repression of workers' rights. They want trade sanctions to save 'American jobs'! They are calling on the American ruling class to do their work for them whilst failing to challenge the logic of 'globalisation'.

Trade union internationalism worthy of the name would concentrate on building support for Chinese workers and any initiatives independent of the state controlled 'union' federation the All China Federation of Trades Unions. Despite state repression of any attempts to build independent unions, there are such initiatives. For instance, the Chinese Working Women's Network is a grassroots organisation of migrant women in the Shenzhen, which works in the Special Economic Zones.

China is the top destination for foreign investment, and 30 million of the world's estimated 47 million migrant workers, originating from the Chinese rural areas, 70% women, most 16-25 years of age. They work 12 to 16 hours a day, living in dormitories. One of the biggest campaigns is for hot water in the dormitories, which gives an idea of the conditions they face.

As a result of the resurgence of unfettered capitalism under the CCP's 'market socialism', millions of workers are being thrown onto the scrap heap. There are widespread struggles emerging around redundancy, unpaid wages, unpaid pensions and unpaid medical fees.

Building links with organisations in China, building international solidarity, is necessary to assist in the building of an independent workers' movement in China. An organised and combative class movement of the Chinese workers is surely an aim of 'global solidarity' rather than calling on the US or any other rulers to carry out trade sanctions and save the unions the trouble of struggling against their own employers.

The Chinese regime is somewhat worried about the social consequences of its economic policy. In August 2004 the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress launched a nationwide inspection of the Trade Union Law. Results showed that less than 10% of the 500,000 foreign funded enterprises in China had trade union organisations. Hence the ACFTU, following its lead from the state, has threatened to blacklist those companies which have refused to set up unions (yes you did read that correctly, the ACFTU is calling on these companies to set up unions!).

Under the law a trade union can be set up following a request by the workers, or from a higher trade union body. For example the

'To build global solidarity it is necessary to abandon the delusion of 'social globalisation'.'

Shenzhen Municipal Federation of Trades Unions has been trying to contact Walmart about setting up unions, but it seems the manager is always away somewhere. Had this 'trade union' had not thought of contacting the workers first?

An ACFTU bureaucrat was at pains to ensure foreign capital that they have nothing to fear from a trade union.

"The function of our trade unions is not to undermine, but rather maintain a sound environment in the work place. Farsighted entrepreneurs should understand the social value of trade unions. The establishment of trade unions in foreign-funded enterprises can benefit both employees and investors, and help solve problems between them in a more rational way," said Guo Jun.

It could have been John Monks talking here...or Brendan Barber!

Outsourcing of work cannot be challenged without the unions refusing to accept Capital's quest for cheaper and cheaper labour. At the same time a global organisation of independent unions which challenge the super-exploitation of the workforce by big business is necessary to stop the 'dash to the bottom'. Solidarity and the development of links with Chinese workers will play an important part in this.

Although the ICFTU Congress has elicited little discussion it is worth quoting the words of Dan Gallin, ex-General Secretary of the International Union of Food Workers.

"A Trade Union International worthy of its name would reallocate its resources away from sterile "dialogues" with the institutions of transnational corporate power that are killing us; it would massively

invest in organizing in transition countries, where the FDIs are going, to rebuild the movement there; it would keep trade union rights in China on top of its agenda; it would give full political and financial support to those Global Union Federations (the new name for the sectoral federations) that are taking on transnational corporations; it would build alliances with workers' movements in the informal economy and other social movements instead of keeping them at arms' length; it would declare war on governments which are attacking social welfare and workers' rights, regardless of their political colour; it would do so publicly and unashamedly, by publicizing the issues as widely as possible, so as to keep the membership informed and involved and to build political support. Had the ICFTU been doing this for the last few years it would not have to worry about merging with anyone today.

A Trade Union International worthy of its name would proudly

proclaim: we represent the world's working class, we represent most of the world's population, and we are fighting to change the social and economic order to make the world a fit place for human beings to live in."

THE ICFTU document is right when it says:

"... ICFTU affiliates need to put the weight of their national movements decisively behind trade union internationalism, and to harness their political strength, and their membership in the task of building an effective workers' counterweight to the forces that oppose us in the global economy."

However, this requires recognition that workers have no interests in common with 'our own' employers. To build 'global solidarity' it is necessary to abandon the delusion of 'social globalisation'.

Cross union action to defend public sector pensions?

Martin Wicks examines the pensions' crisis, the threat to public sector workers, and the response of the unions.

The year 2005 will almost certainly see a general election. The irony of the rhetoric about a glorious third term for the New Labour government will not be lost on those people who are facing the threat of the worsening of their pension as a result of the policy of this government. Local government, civil service, fire service, teachers, all of them face proposals which will increase the contribution for each worker, cut the employer's contribution and force the employee to work more years. Most of the proposals raise the retirement age from 60 to 65.

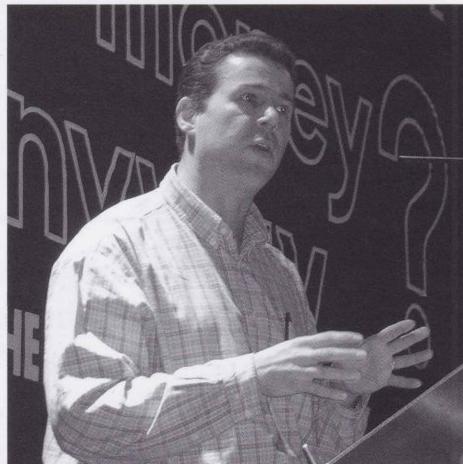
Whilst the government presents such action as necessity in the face of the so-called 'demographic time bomb' the reality is that the move away from final salary schemes to some form of money purchase one, was the result of a decline in the stock markets and a decline in the profitability of private companies on a global scale. Given the centrality of investments by pension funds, a big decline in the markets will always have a great impact on them. Gordon Brown's decision to end the tax free status of pension funds also had a detrimental effect.

The move to abandon final salary schemes marks a move by employers to cut their liabilities and transfer the cost of pensions to their employees. The proposals of the government, despite their denials, have the same motivation; shifting the balance of costs from the employer to the employee.

Civil Service

In the case of the civil service pension, the government's proposals are:

To raise retirement age from 60 to 65, from 2006 for new starters and from 2013 for existing staff;



To raise the contribution rate for new entrants to 3.5% of pensionable earnings from April 2006 (most staff pay 1.5%);
To increase the age of early retirement from 50 to 55;
To replace the final salary scheme with a "career average" one.

Staff who retire after 2013 will be particularly hard hit since from that year their contributions will be paid into the "average" scheme and they will have to work until 65 to get their pension. They will be working 5 more years for a lower pension than the one they have previously been expecting.

According to the BBC, actuaries Lane Clark and Peacock say that some people will see their pension halved. The costs of contributing to the scheme are also likely to rise in the future, as the government has said that contribution rates should not be fixed.

The government says that career average schemes are "much more in tune with modern working practices", as it will give more "flexibility" to workers. It says that the existing system can provide "perverse incentives for staff to stay on when it is no

longer in the best interests for themselves or management". (It stops them clearing out all the 'dead wood'!) Final salary schemes can be 'over-generous' to people who receive a substantial pay rise close to the end of their career. They "benefit members with long service at the expense of those with shorter service". This is nonsense of course. Your pension is determined by your wage and your service not by what somebody else receives.

The average pay out for this grossly overgenerous pension is £4,800 a year!

Other public sector pensions

A review of the NHS pension scheme has been undertaken in 'partnership' with the unions. Details are expected on January 10th 2005. It is supposedly "cost neutral". It's not about cost cutting, honestly, but about 'rebalancing the benefits and offering more flexibility'. The January 10 document is likely to call for the raising of the retirement age from 60 to 65, and the minimum age at which benefits can be taken from 50 to 55. It will also 'consult' on changing from a final salary to a career average earnings basis.

The local government pension scheme, like the civil service classic scheme, pays nearly two thirds of final salary as a retirement income. There are more than three million active and retired members and approaching £100bn of assets. A £12bn shortfall in the various funds is the motivation for 'reform'.

Members pay 6% rather than the 1.5% most civil servants pay. The average payout is low - £3,700. Under the proposals retirement age rises from 60 to 65 from 2008. The "85-year rule", which allowed a council worker who has clocked up 30 years to retire at 55 on full pension rights, will be abolished.

A consultation on the 'modernization' of the

teachers' pension scheme has recently been completed. Under proposals retirement age will increase from 60 to 65, taking effect from September 2006 for new entrants, and September 2013 for existing teachers. Also proposed is a tightening up of ill-health retirement benefits.

Firefighters already pay a high 11% towards their pension. Under the proposals pension age would rise from 60 to 65. Currently staff with 30 years service can retire at 50. This will rise to 55. One of the main concerns of the government is the fact that around 54% of pensioners are in receipt of an ill-health pension. They want to make it much more difficult to receive this. The demands of the job, of course, are more rigorous than most. How many 64 year olds are fit enough to be climbing ladders and tackling fires?

Special privileges

Unlike others police officers have been assured that current staff will maintain their existing pension. And as we know, judges have been given special privileges. And as Dave Prentis and others have pointed out, whilst the government is demanding cuts for everybody else, in 2002 they improved already generous pensions for MPs.

An attack on all public sector workers

From this brief survey you can see that all public sector workers are facing an attack on their existing pension schemes. Although negotiations are taking place sector by sector, Mark Serwotka (pictured), leader of the PCS, was right to pose the need for public sector wide action against this threat to pensions.

On December 13th a special meeting was called by the TUC to discuss a common negotiating position, and a coordinated response. They issued a statement which said:

"TUC public service unions today declared their determination to campaign strongly together to oppose deeply damaging changes to public service pensions schemes...The TUC will be seeking an urgent meeting with senior Ministers to press union concerns and to seek the evidence on which Government proposals are based. Unions will be demanding genuine negotiation on any proposed changes, with the aim of offering real choice for members of public service schemes.

Plans will now be made to intensify the campaign following on from last month's successful Parliamentary lobby by public service unions. This will include further lobbying of MPs, and planning for a day of campaigning action in the New Year.

If constructive progress is not made the

possibility of industrial action may then arise. A further meeting will be held early in January to review developments and plans for the campaign."

Speaking after the meeting, Mark Serwotka said: "We welcome the fact that public sector unions have come together today to talk about a common response to the problems we all face on public sector pensions. There has been recognition that the public sector is facing a common attack on pensions. In speaking with one clear voice we hope the government will now listen to the union movement's concerns and reconsider their proposals to compulsory change the retirement age."

"We hope that by meeting with senior ministers they will recognise the need for real choices in pensions and that through positive representations we will be able to encourage them to rethink their position. However, should negotiations not be successful we will be asking the TUC to coordinate protest action across the whole of the public sector."

Dave Prentis of UNISON announced that the union would start consulting its members on the possibility of strike action next year. Subsequently, UNISON's Local Government Service Group Executive has set out a timetable for strike action, subject to consultation. A ballot for industrial action is timetabled for February 4th to March 4th. The ballot will be for 'discontinuous action' starting with a one day strike taking place within a month of the closure of the ballot.

Meanwhile a joint statement by the TGWU and GMB has agreed on a joint campaign against the pension proposals for local government.

Political pressure

United Left candidate for UNISON General Secretary, John Rogers, whilst welcoming the SGE decision has rightly warned that opposition to strike action in the run up to the General Election, within UNISON, had not disappeared. That opposition "could not declare itself too plainly because of the growing strength of feeling in the union against attacks on pensions."

Political pressure will be brought to bear on the affiliated unions not to take strike action in the run up to the General Election, expected in May or June. Voices are already being raised along the lines of 'don't do anything to risk the third term'. Will the unions place the interests of their members first?

As the London Region of the FBU has pointed out in a submission to the union on strategy for defending their pension, the run up to the General Election is precisely the time to step up political pressure which will be reinforced by industrial action. The

GMB, for instance, has already taken a policy that it will only support Labour candidates who support union policy. The demand should be placed on all Labour candidates, support our members, don't support an attack on their pensions. If they support the government then they will not be supported by the union.

This is not a government which will be persuaded by a good argument. It will be necessary for serious action to force them to retreat.

Service users and other pensions

Of course, when public sector workers take action it does not hit at profits, it stops service provision. It is therefore crucial for those who provide a service to seek the support of service users. The PCS for instance, has highlighted the fact that job cuts on the scale being proposed will worsen the service provided.

Real action by public sector workers in defence of their pensions should be an issue which connects with many millions of people in the private sector who have suffered, or are threatened with a worsening of their pensions, and the millions who struggle to exist on a paltry state pension. This is a campaign against pensioner poverty.

The unions should also link the attack on their issue to that of a state pension which provides people with enough to live on, and an end to means testing. Such an approach could build a very wide movement in which the common interests of public sector workers are combined with those of service users, especially those who suffer the consequences of the means-testing regime.

Whilst we are dealing here with different pension schemes, uniting workers in public sector wide strike action by local government workers, civil servants, firefighters etc, will create the maximum pressure to make the government pause to consider the industrial and political cost of their course. Whilst negotiations will go on sector by sector, preparations should be made now for coordinated action. Pressure needs to be brought to bear on the unions to take decisive action.

The public sector unions should show that they are not just taking action for self-interest, but that they are opposing pensioner poverty, as it affects those in work and those retired. There should be organised in every locality meetings of those unions under threat, with Trades Councils, pensioners' organisations and any interested parties, to prepare action and to build a campaign broader than those directly affected. The support of millions of people could be mobilised and the government would not be able to isolate public sector workers.

FBU: our members deserved better

Paul Emberry, a member of the London Regional Executive of the FBU, gives his personal assessment of the Firefighters' dispute.

The long-running fire service dispute is at an end. There have been numerous false dawns already, but the recent deadlock over the employers' refusal to release long-overdue pay rises that were explicitly written into the settlement reached last year has been broken, and, with it, the spark that was ignited two years ago when the Fire Brigades Union first lodged its claim for a salary of £30000 for a qualified firefighter has ignominiously fizzled out.

FBU members throughout the country have greeted the news with what can best be described as a grudging acceptance. On the one hand, they are relieved to have secured the 3.5% due from last November and 4.2% from this July, but they are sufficiently shrewd to realise that this has certainly been no "victory". In fact, the most recent impasse was resolved in an identical fashion to the countless preceding stalemates that punctuated the dispute: FBU leadership and national employers arrive at a deadlock...both talk tough, dig their heels in and resolve not to back down...FBU leadership attempts to negotiate its way out of deadlock, realises employers are serious about their demands, and then the slow retreat begins.

Conditions of service emasculated

To describe the last two years as a disaster for FBU members would not be over-egging things and is not to do a disservice to those who led the pay campaign. We have seen our conditions of service emasculated, with many cornerstones of FBU policy being jettisoned as the unleashed whirlwind that is the employers' "modernisation agenda" attempts to destroy everything in its path. The mission to decimate the fire service is underway, with job losses, reduced fire cover and regionalisation the order of the day. One of the last bastions of the public sector is in danger of being captured, with the privateers falling over themselves in the race to feast off the spoils.

The 16% (though not even that, in many cases) pay increase that we eventually secured is greatly devalued by virtue of its being strewn over three long years and further diminished, firstly by the knowledge that the old pay formula, now obsolete as a result of the dispute, would have delivered not far short of that figure over a similar period; and secondly, by the



loss of long-service pay worth up to a thousand pounds a year for many FBU members. The fact that we were promised by the leadership, when we accepted the deal, that long-service pay was safeguarded, makes more bitter that particular pill to swallow. Quite simply, for many members, the price we have had to pay has been much too high.

Stop-start tactics

It didn't have to be this way. Had the FBU leadership been serious about industrial action from the beginning, things might have turned out differently. But the constant retreats, vacillations and cancellations of strike action, when nothing of any substance was being offered in return, contributed significantly to the union's downfall. The leadership's stop-start tactics made the entire union look weak and vulnerable, at a time when the members were strong and committed. The strategy was, ultimately, fatally flawed. With 87% voting in favour of industrial action, the strategy could afford to be bold and aggressive. Instead, it was timid and hesitant.

And the spectacle of the FBU leadership now desperately trying to defend the settlement and its handling of the affair is redolent, paradoxically, of the Labour government's defence of its actions over Iraq. Last year, FBU leaders managed just - to convince an extremely sceptical recall conference that the deal was a respectable one and the best we were likely to get in the circumstances. Many delegates warned that not only was the deal wholly inadequate, it was full of gaping holes; it was "patchy" and "sketchy" and "vague". The union's leadership was clearly trying to "sex it up" in order to persuade the doubters. By signing the deal, we would be opening up a proverbial can of worms, as virtually our entire working conditions would be up for grabs in the ensuing negotiations. And, it was pointed out, by signing away the strike mandate, any bargaining power we were likely to have inside those negotiations would be

severely limited.

"Trust us"

"Trust us", said the leadership, in a way that suggested they knew more than they could let on. Give us the authority to call off the dispute and sign the deal, and we'll get the best possible outcome from those negotiations on your behalf.

However, the after-plan appeared not to have been properly thought through in the rush to "peace". And now, sixteen months later, we see the results. Those who warned of the dangers inherent in the deal at the time, and who were given short shrift by the FBU leadership, have been vindicated. Their suggestion that the signing of the deal would lead to increased conflict in local brigades throughout the UK, as fire authorities freed from the constraints of national provisions on fire cover run amok, has been proved to be totally justified. The employers, apparently not satisfied with their resounding victory, subsequently, on a number of occasions dishonoured the deal, withheld agreed pay rises and forced further concessions from an FBU leadership that realised it had put a match to a tinderbox and now couldn't wait to "cut and run". There was only ever going to be one winner emerging from the negotiations, and so it proved.

"Recalcitrant politicos"?

At least the British public got a partial apology from Blair. All that FBU members have received is a half-hearted admission from the assistant general secretary in a recent article that some mistakes were made (though he didn't say what they were), and even that was negated by an accompanying vitriolic attack on those who had *really* been responsible for the union's demise, namely everybody ranging from Tony Blair and Nick Raynsford to a group of recalcitrant "politicos" inside the FBU who had apparently undermined the pay campaign by their thoughtless opposition to the leadership's strategy.

How our union went from delivering a nine to one strike mandate with overwhelming public and labour movement backing to finding itself in the position today of settling for what is in real terms a negligible pay increase, whilst simultaneously having to fight a seemingly constant rearguard action against an emboldened set of employers hell-bent on massacring our service and conditions, is the million dollar question. Though, it is

fair to say, FBU members are hardly divided on the answer. In fact, the only division that exists in the FBU today is that between the members and the leadership. I have spoken to countless members at meetings in London and throughout the country since the deal was signed, and it is no exaggeration to say that not a single person has ventured to suggest that it was a decent outcome. And, however strenuously the FBU leadership tries to rewrite history and convince them otherwise, the members have made their minds up.

Winning the battle of ideas

The anger and demoralisation of FBU members in the wake of the pay defeat has led to some personal attacks on officials at the head of the union. This is both wrong and counter-productive. Those who oppose the agenda of the leadership must not resort to personalities but, instead, constructively set about trying to win the battle of ideas. Though this itself has recently been made harder with the leadership's decision to ban the rank and file grouping, Grassroots FBU.

Grassroots FBU was formed by rank and file members and officials as a reaction to the defeat of the pay campaign. Its purpose was to campaign for a fighting union that had democracy at its heart. In fact, since the dispute, democracy in the union has taken a back seat. Decisions are too often made by a handful of people at the top, with little concern for the opinions of the rank and file, and standard democratic processes have been sidestepped. There is a real sense amongst the members that the leadership has become totally detached and impervious to any alternative strategy.

Grassroots FBU immediately began to win an audience among these disenfranchised members. By distributing bulletins and holding national meetings, the group provided a forum for members to discuss the best way to go about reclaiming their union. It supported the idea of electoral challenges to current leaders, and tried to encourage a culture of democracy and accountability at all levels of the union. Along with the *uk-fire.net* website it was the chief galvaniser of opposition to the leadership's agenda, and the leadership knew it. That's why it has been proscribed. But its banning is simply evidence of the leadership's deep concern about the groundswell of opposition that is engulfing them, and should not be seen as a sign of their strength. They realise that they are hanging on to power by a thread, so they use the time-honoured tactic employed by numerous bureaucrats throughout history of launching a witch-hunt to crush dissent.

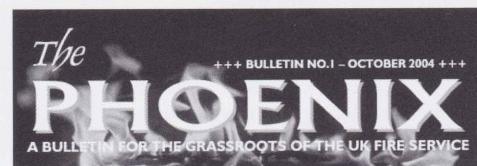
Hold to account those responsible

At some point, our union *must* move on from the pay dispute. But this can only be achieved when the members feel that they have had the opportunity to hold to account those responsible. That process has begun. Since the end of the dispute, there have been two high-profile elections, and the leadership's favoured candidate has been beaten by a rank and file candidate on both occasions. In the first, Paul Woolstenholmes from Suffolk defeated the incumbent national officer by a clear margin of two thousand votes. (Paul was later suspended on trumped-up charges by the leadership and then reinstated when it became clear that the evidence against him was utterly flawed) And, in an election for the West Midlands executive council member, a divisional rep from Birmingham, John Vernon, beat Dave Whatton, a leadership loyalist who had held the post for several years and was, to boot, the vice-president and national treasurer. Both victors would be the first to admit that their successes were mainly due to the members' bitterness towards those who had failed them and their desire to be represented by people who were prepared to give proper regard to their views.

But whilst the leadership may attempt to crush Grassroots FBU, they cannot destroy the ideas for which it fought. Because, despite the trials of the last two years, the union remains intact and the members strong and resilient. Though they have been short-changed, they realise that the FBU remains the only show in town when it comes to effective trade unionism in the UK fire service. However, they want and deserve better. And many are prepared to actively fight for a truly democratic and campaigning union in a way that they hadn't considered before. The dispute has shone a light on the internal practices inside the FBU. Things had previously been done in a totally top-down manner, where instructions were passed down from the top and compliant middle-ranking officials carried out the leadership's wishes in their own regions and brigades. Election candidates were decided behind closed doors, usually by the EC's self-styled 'Left Group' in the case of national elections, and the membership was completely tail-ended and sidelined from the decision-making process. All that is changing. The next six months will be pivotal for the Fire Brigades Union, with the elections for both general secretary and assistant general secretary taking place.

So, yes, a sigh of relief from all of us that the pay dispute is finally at an end. But the aftershock will be felt for some time to come. If some consolation can be found in

the FBU's defeat, it is that membership activity and awareness has increased dramatically. For any union to thrive, it needs an active membership and a strong leadership. We have one half of the equation. The task now is to achieve the other.



Rising from the ashes?

Following the banning of Grassroots FBU by the union leadership, activists have launched a new Bulletin to challenge the anti-democratic actions of the Gilchrist clique and to maintain debate on the issues facing the members as a result of the disastrous emasculation of conditions of service referred to by Paul Embrey.

As we said in **SOLIDARITY** E-Newsletter (http://uk.geocities.com/solidarity_magazine/Enews15.rtf), the banning was partly based on the spurious grounds that Grassroots FBU was planning a breakaway union. This was a convenient stick with which to beat Grassroots, but it was the height of cynicism because the leadership knew full well that Grassroots had fought for disillusioned members to stay in the FBU.

The ban, in reality was a pre-emptive strike by bureaucrats fearful of the verdict of the members in forthcoming elections. They are concerned solely with hanging onto office and all its trappings.

The lead article in Phoenix is headed "Defend Free Speech in the FBU".

"The truth is, since the ignominious end of the pay dispute, the FBU leadership is hanging onto power by a thread. Opposition and dissent are no longer tolerated. Democracy is bypassed and the right to free speech curtailed. Anyone who speaks out publicly against the Andy Gilchrist regime is with hunted. Such witch hunts are a time honoured tactic, used by leaders who have run out of ideas and are afraid of discussion and debate.

But the ideas that were fought for by Grassroots FBU and shared by thousands of FBU members throughout the country are still relevant. And those who are leading the fight will not go away. The leadership can run but it can't hide. The members are slowly reclaiming their union."

Trades Unionists for another Europe

Alain Baron of the French union SUD-PTT writes:

Please find attached a preliminary appeal for European trade-unionists which was discussed by several comrades during the European social Forum in London. We are circulating it through the ESF/FSE network to stimulate a debate on what is at stake for the labour movement with the Constitutional treaty. We will subsequently decide together whether to publicly launch this appeal across Europe.

Trade-unionists must pay careful attention to the content and the dynamic of the Constitutional Treaty. Workers, pensioners and the unemployed are directly concerned by the "constitutionalisation" of neo-liberal policies.

The adoption of this "Constitution" would legitimise to an even greater degree the attacks against public services, which can open up to further competition through the Bolkenstein Directive, or against working conditions with yet greater flexibility.

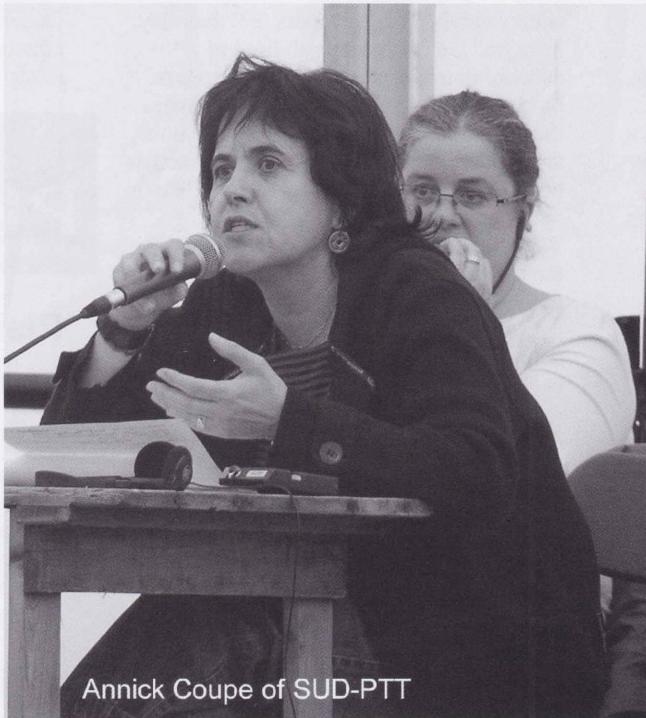
It is therefore important that we campaign to defend the collective rights of workers, pensioners and the unemployed against this neo-liberal offensive.

Contact us at:
Trade-unionist.appeal@wanadoo.fr

We as trade unionists want another Europe, opposed to neo-liberal policies and Transnational corporations. But the Europe that we want is not the one in the making today.

The "Constitution" adopted by the European Union Heads of State and Government on June 18th, 2004 sets in stone a wide range of political, economic and social measures that should be debated as widely possible. This set of restrictive neo-liberal measures takes us in the direction of free-market rule, and free movement of capital and Transnational corporations. This "Constitution" for the European Union boasts as one of its founding principle that of an "open economic market where competition is free and undistorted".

This principle, at the very heart of EU treaties, fuels across Europe the attacks



Annick Coupe of SUD-PTT

against public services and welfare rights, and encourages the lengthening of the working week and the greater flexibility of working conditions.

The rights of workers, pensioners and the unemployed are being challenged. This is clearly shown by the draft EU Directive on working hours. Unemployment and poverty are on the rise due to these neo-liberal economic policies.

Despite the well-intentioned statements on the Services of Public Interest, this principle also allows for the introduction of competition and privatisation. It encourages relocation and social dumping as allowed for by the Bolkenstein draft Directive on the privatisation of services.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights has been included in the "Constitution". However, it does not allow for new European social measures to counter-balance free competition, which is the only real common requirement across the European Union. The "Constitutional Treaty" is unacceptable on many issues: it replaces the right to a job by only the opportunity to work, the right to strike at a European level is not recognised and it refuses equal rights for those European residents who are not nationals of one of the member states.

If the "Constitutional Treaty" is ratified, all 25 member states will have to unanimously agree in future any amendments. This will be virtually

impossible to achieve. Therefore the choice of economic policies will escape from any public debate and democratic accountability. Any progressive social measures, including through improvements in the Charter of Fundamental Rights would become utopian.

State sovereignty is being handed over to undemocratic institutions such as the European commission or the European Central Bank. The latter maintains price control and freezes budgetary policies at the expense of public services, welfare benefits, wages and employment. This Europe is being constructed not in the open with popular participation but in closed back-room negotiations between governments.

This neo-liberal European Union is a threat for the very idea of a Europe of the people because it fosters dangerous reactionary and populist ideas, nationalism and the racist far right.

It is high time that we fight for a Europe that breaks from this predatory neo-liberalism, and which embraces social justice, peace, democracy, sustainable development and co-operation between the peoples in the world.

We are resolutely committed to a Europe that fights unemployment, poverty and the deterioration of our environment. Welfare rights must be strengthened. Economic policies and taxation must be co-ordinated and harmonised for the benefit of people, not profit. Public services must be developed on a European scale to meet social need and not to support private corporations. Economic policies must be implemented which are committed to protecting the environment. Positive rights, equality, and anti-discriminatory policies for all should be adopted urgently. Our Europe should be democratic, and based on full citizenship for all its residents.

For such a Europe, which is so necessary, to become a reality, all citizens must be able to speak out. In all European countries, everybody must be consulted on their future. To open the road towards "another Europe", this "Constitutional Treaty" must be rejected and we must mobilise to fight for the rights of workers, pensioners and the unemployed in the construction of Europe.

"A threat to rights, services and democracy"

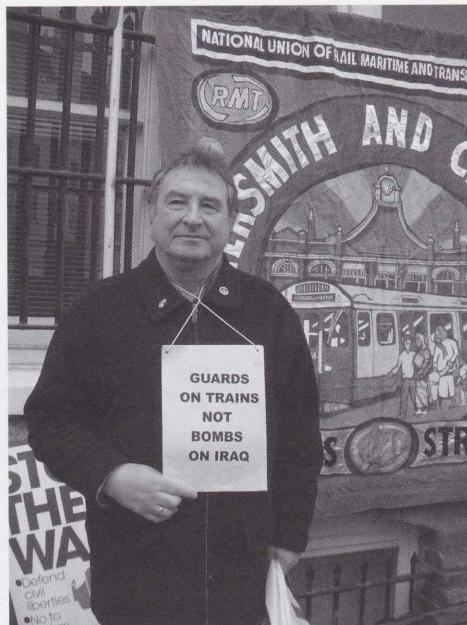
OCTOBER 15: European workers should unite against the threat to jobs, public services, democracy and rights posed by the proposed European constitution, RMT president Tony Donaghey (pictured) said at the European Social Forum in London.

"Working people need this constitution like turkeys need Christmas," Tony Donaghey said.

"Far from ensuring workers' rights and decent public services, this constitution is a privatisers' charter and will do nothing to stop governments maintaining anti-union laws."

If adopted it will effectively outlaw attempts by governments to roll back the years of privatisation and attacks on public services, and will force member countries to remain on the neo-liberal economic treadmill. It is an attempt to close the door on socialist policies.

Public opinion in Britain is demanding a



return to a publicly owned, publicly funded and publicly accountable railway, yet the EU is marching us in the opposite direction.

More liberalisation and naked capitalist competition means a reverse auction on pay and jobs in which the lowest bid wins, and the constitution will lock us into that

process.

Opening up Europe's railways to competition will pit worker against worker and can only force pay and conditions down - and that is exactly what Europe's boss class wants.

The Scottish Executive is already using EU rules to force Caledonian MacBrayne's essential ferry routes in Scotland into a wasteful and unnecessary tendering process, but the constitution will mean that the loopholes currently available to get us out of it will be closed.

Anyone who suggests that the European constitution will enable us to get rid of anti-union laws can't have read it - hardly surprising really, as it's 800 pages long and not exactly exciting reading.

But one of the powers our government will retain is the power to restrict the right to strike and to impose other repressive anti-union measures.

Any government that hands over power to the degree set out in the proposed constitution is in reality no longer a government at all."

Bolkestein directive

On 16 January 2004 the European Commission brought forward a proposal for a Directive on Services in the Internal Market, (without any prior consultation, as part of the Lisbon agenda to make the EU "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010".

The unions in Europe have raised questions about the impact of this Directive on provision of public services. In particular the "country of origin" principle means that company's operating on a "temporary" basis in other countries than the one in which they are based, will not have to comply with regulations in the 'host country', but only the country of origin. This not only threatens public services, but it opens the threat that businesses may set up their 'home' base in countries with less regulations.

This also poses a threat, for instance, to Health and Safety. The Centre for Corporate Responsibility reported that: "Non-UK European businesses providing services in Britain on a non-permanent basis may no longer have to comply with British health and safety law if the European Parliament and Council of Minister agrees to the text of a new Framework Directive currently under consultation.

The Health and Safety Executive and Local Authorities will not be able to inspect, investigate, impose enforcement notices or lay criminal charges against the company or individuals for any breaches of health and safety law, according to the "Directive on Services in the Internal market".

Non-UK European companies in Britain will instead have to comply with their own country's laws and only HSE equivalent bodies of the foreign country will be able enforce the law in Britain."

David Bergman, Director of the Centre for Corporate Accountability said: "This must surely not only be wrong in principle, but must be unworkable in practice. If HSE inspectors go to a factory and find that a non-British European business - which is not based in Britain 'indefinitely' - is failing to comply with health and safety law in the way it provides a service to the factory, the Directive would mean that the inspector could do nothing, even if the company's working practices are in serious breach of the law. The HSE would have to inform the regulator from the business's country



of origin and wait to see whether they will act. A similar British company giving the same service at the same factory, in contrast, could have an enforcement notice imposed on it and if the breach is serious enough, be subject to prosecution."

Even the Health & Safety Commission says:

"HSC believes that the 'Country of Origin Principle' is not feasible in relation to health and safety regulation and enforcement. If implemented, this area of the Directive seriously risks undermining health and safety standards in Britain. Therefore HSC seeks an exemption for health and safety from the Country of Origin Principle."

The British Medical Association has called for exclusion of health services from the directive.

We will have an extended article in the next issue of **SOLIDARITY**.

Visit the web site:
www.stopbolkestein.org

Repeal the 1987 Labour Laws

The following interview was conducted by Alex Gordon, with Iraqi trade unionists visiting Britain as guests of UNISON from 8th - 18th November 2004, as part of an international solidarity and capacity-building exercise with Iraqi trade unions. The delegation of 6 representatives of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) took part in organising and education courses and was introduced to UNISON's Conference, Equality, Branch and Regional structures.

As well as receiving training on negotiation and campaigning skills, 'mapping exercises' and other organising tools, the delegation met with union officers and lay representatives from a number of different unions, including UNISON, TGWU, RMT & CWU in both Bristol and Glasgow.

The IFTU members in the delegation included two women members, Alia Hussein, an Executive Committee member and Naafa Najib, President of a local branch of the Agricultural Workers Union. The four men in the IFTU delegation were Hassan Shabar, Culture/Media Officer for the Transport & Communication Workers' Union; Muhsin Jasim, Baghdad Regional Secretary and Abdul Hasan, Treasurer of the Public & Social Service Workers' Union; and Arkan Jewad Kadhum, a member of the Railway Workers' Union.

Alia Hussein (Baghdad Regional Executive Committee, Agricultural Workers Union - AWU) and Naafa Najib (Branch President, AWU)

Naafa Najib: "I work as an auditor in a department of the Ministry of Agriculture. My department is concerned with supplying all types of agriculture equipment, fertiliser, seeds, etc. In my department there are about 600 workers and administrators and we have 120 members in our local union branch of the Agricultural Workers' Union."

Alia Hussein: "I work as an administrator in a public sector company, the Veterinary Company, which is under the direction of the Ministry of Agriculture. In the Baghdad region our union has 27 workers' committees and we also organise workers in 14 other provinces across Iraq."

"I was elected as a member of the Executive Committee of the AWU at our first Conference in June this year. There are 15 members of the Executive Committee. I have special responsibility for women's issues; maternity leave,



sickness, health issues, etc. I organise seminars and meetings on all types of women's issues as well as human rights, public health, health and safety and computer training. I was organising a computer-training course just before I left Baghdad to come to Britain."

"At our Conference in June we took decisions to demand the repeal of the 1987 Labour Law of Saddam Hussein. We also called for the voice of women to be increased in society and politics and particularly in the interim national assembly. We also called for a campaign against unemployment."

Defending Women's Rights

"When the Governing Council abolished the 1959 Personal Status Law (Family Law) which gave men and women equal legal status and introduced Law 137, on 29 December we protested against it. Under Law 137 women would have to get permission from a family member before being able to marry, their husbands could forbid them from working and divorce them by saying 'I divorce you' three times and would not have to pay alimony."

"Many women from non-governmental organisations, trade unions and women's organisations held a Conference in June in Al Waziria district in Baghdad at the veterinary school conference building. Over 300 women representing thousands of others took part. We demanded the repeal of the Law 137. One month later the

law was repealed."

Hassan Shabar (Culture/Media Officer, Transport & Communication Workers' Union - T&CWU)

"I am unemployed but I work full-time for the T&CWU. I was a garage mechanic and a student. The T&CWU organises the sectors covered by the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Communication."

"In all the state-run workplaces, directly under the control of the two ministries we have set up union committees. In addition we have union committees established in private sector companies, such as the private bus companies that operate both within Baghdad and between Baghdad and other cities."

"In Iraq there are also a number of companies in which we call the 'mixed sector', which means those companies owned by a combination of private shareholders and public interests, for example the 'Badia' road haulage company where we have also built union committees."

"We estimate that we have at least 10,000 members in Baghdad alone. The reason that we cannot be more precise is that since our union was formed following the 16th May 2003 founding conference of the IFTU up until recently we had not developed a proper membership registration and subscription system."

"We recently produced a membership application form, which new members have to sign when they join the union. This allows us to develop accurate membership records. I am involved in setting up this system and compiling membership lists. I had to stop when we reached 10,000 to prepare my journey to London."

"Our union's structure is based on workplace committees and branches. In June this year we held our first Conference in Baghdad, each workplace committee of the union was entitled to send a representative and there was a proportional quota system to allow larger workplaces more than one representative. During June there were also conferences held by the Public and Social Services Union, the Mechanics Union, the Agricultural Workers' Union, the Textile Workers' Union and the Construction Workers' Union."

"All of the conferences were organised by an IFTU Conference Preparations Committee, composed of representatives of each of the IFTU's affiliated unions. The Conference started by holding elections to choose the leadership of the new union. The elected Executive Committee then took suggestions from delegates for actions and campaigns and several political and industrial decisions were taken."

Reinstatement of victimised workers

"The Conference of the T&CWU unanimously demanded the re-instatement of victimised workers who had been dismissed for political activities in the past. Our Conference also demanded that the Interim Government repeal the 1987 Labour Law of Saddam Hussein, which classifies public sector workers as 'state officials' and makes public sector strikes illegal."

"In July this year the Executive Committee took up the demand of the Conference for us to re-open the union offices, which had been closed down by the American military on 6th December 2003. The Executive Committee met and decided to break the locks the Americans had put on the building and to re-occupy it."

"We prepared well for the action and led a march and a demonstration to the offices which we re-opened. There were approximately 300 union members on the march and they had banners that read: "Long Live the Union of the Workers Death to Colonialism!" This is a famous slogan of the workers' movement from the 1930s and 40s. We have kept the American locks as souvenirs."

Opposing privatisation

"Recently, the T&CWU has been involved in opposing attempts by the interim government at privatisation. Our sector has been chosen as the first one for the government to try to privatise state industries. The Communication Ministry announced in September that it planned to dismiss 1,000 out of 3,000 workers employed by the Telephone Maintenance Company. The Ministry sent out termination notices to the workers, saying that the workers selected for dismissal were only temporary and of no further use, although all of the workers had been employed for 10 years or more."

"The Ministry said that because of shortage of funds it wanted to sell the Telephone Maintenance Company to a private company, but they did not say which one. The T&CWU Executive Committee met and decided to try to negotiate with the Ministry, but the Ministry refused to negotiate. So we organised a public protest in front of the Ministry buildings in the middle of October and started a media campaign using the IFTU newspaper and a local Baghdad newspaper, 'Al Jareeda'. The result was the Ministry did not dare to risk a public confrontation on this issue and reinstated all of the workers that were sent notices of dismissal."

Muhsin Jasim (Baghdad Regional Secretary, Public & Social Service Workers' Union - P&SSWU)

"I was a technician and boiler maintenance worker for the Ministry of Industry until I was dismissed for political reasons in 1982. I then worked as a cleaning contractor. I am now the Regional Secretary of the P&SSWU in Baghdad. I work for the union in the morning and as a youth worker in the afternoon."

"Our union organises all grades of civil servants in all government ministries, non-medical (ancillary) workers in the health sector and private sector service workers in hotels, clubs, cinemas, barbers, restaurants, coffee shops and in tourism. We have between 100-120,000 members in Baghdad and 300-400,000 members nationally in Iraq."

"We have already started a membership subscription system and members pay about 1% of their wages. Temporary Contract workers typically earn 60-70,000 Iraqi Dinars (IrD) about \$45 / £25 - per month, although some have been employed on these contracts for 14 years



or more. Permanent workers typically earn IrD 150-200,000 - \$100-134 / £54-72 per month."

"Our union's Conference in June this year decided to organise all workers throughout the service sector industries, whether they are employed on temporary or permanent contracts. To do this we have to get rid of the inhibitions that many workers still have towards trade unions because of the history of Saddam's 'yellow unions'. Our Conference also demanded that the Interim Government repeal the 1987 Labour Laws that are aimed against public sector workers in particular."

Hotel strike

"We have organised strikes recently in the hotel sector in Baghdad. The union called a 2-day strike against the dismissal of 24 hotel workers at the 'Baghdad Hotel' - one of the big hotels in the 'Green Zone' where the Americans stay. At the time that the hotel workers were dismissed, there was no union committee at the hotel, but as a result of the strike we formed a union committee. The strike didn't only educate our members, they educated the hotel manager too."

"The strike was very difficult for the management because many Americans stay at the hotel. They were very angry and disturbed that the hotel wasn't cleaned for 2 days. They tried to bribe us by inviting us to eat dinner with them, but we refused. In all 180 workers at the hotel took part in the strike the entire workforce. Workers in other big hotels saw the strike and formed union committees as well."

"Our union together with the IFTU is planning a march and demonstration soon demanding the right for trade unions to be represented in the planned national constitutional assembly. We want ordinary members to have the right to stand for election as trade union candidates to represent our members politically and to take forward our demands for a repeal of the 1987 Labour Laws."

Carpenters for a Rank & File Union

Cliff Willmeng, of Carpenters Local 1, in Chicago, writes on the building of an opposition caucus in the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. The article is reproduced from the US magazine **Labor's Militant Voice**.

(www.laborsmilitantvoice.org)

In our latest issue of "Carpenter" magazine our International has printed a literal checklist of what I am supposed to know as a union carpenter in order to make my boss happy. Titled "Nine Good Points", the small article teaches me to be dependable, hard working and to bring "positive attitude" to my job site so that the contractor can stay competitive and profitable. It comes as no surprise to myself and the people I work next to, however; it has been the general slogan of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners for many years now, a labor body at the cutting edge of today's business unionism. In a time of bottomless retreat and capitulation to global capitalism across the US labor movement, the enterprising strategists of the UBC have decided to make employers the number one priority in their vision for a new labor movement.

Carpenters' rebellion

Here in Chicago a rebellion has occurred as a result of these changes. Starting in Carpenters Local 1, home of Haymarket martyr Louis Lingg and the first carpenter Local in the US, the opposition has rumbled its way across the entire Chicago District Council, onto job sites and into local meetings. Like everywhere else in the labor movement, the voices comprising this rebellion are diverse and loud, divergent and powerful. We are called Carpenters For A Rank And File Union, a group of tool carrying carpenters and millwrights that have become so controversial in Chicago that the District Council officials refuse to even speak our name.

The start of the rebellion first came when our International president Douglas McCarron withdrew our union from the AFL-CIO, citing weak organizing and the need to increase membership. The maneuver was quickly taken up as a bogus effort to divide the building trades by a few of us turned out flyers and hard hat stickers. We stood against McCarron and for solidarity of the building trades. The flyers had an enormous effect on the building sites where they were given out. It was the first time in many years, I was told, that carpenters began to be seen by the other trades as their allies and brothers. After a year of discussions and meetings we ran for office in Local 1. Carpenters For A Rank And File Union spent endless hours and late nights hammering out a platform of

common demands that we would fight for, election victors or not. The platform combined demands for better insurance and an early retirement with measures needed to return control of the union to the people that sweat and sometimes die to build and maintain the edifices of Chicago and beyond.

Red-baiting

Even being a totally unheard of effort with no experience in running for Local office, we received 38% of the vote and cemented our effort into the business of Carpenters Local 1. The union officialdom, as it will in all occasions threatening its interests, reacted with enormous hostility and offence, red baiting, smearing and sometimes physically attacking our members. Unfortunately for them we have proved both politically and physically a viable opposition that is not going to be leaving anytime soon.

Our real introduction to the carpenters of Chicago outside of Local 1 came after people from around twelve locals met to decide on a campaign to reduce our retirement age from 62 to 55 years of age or 30 years of service. The campaign spread like a fanned fire across the area, with carpenters devoting thousands of hours to collect signatures on petitions making the argument for 30/55 AND OUT! to our District Council. Our members raided union Christmas parties with petitions and flyers, and job sites became places of debate and discussion. By May 1 of 2003 we decided to call our first Rally For Retirement, to hand in over 4000 names to the District Council allocation meeting.

Retirement age reduced

The rally had around ten total days for preparation, which meant that our nerves and resources would be stretched. (It's something we have really gotten used to.) We had to acquire a sound system, get out flyers, and contact the Chicago Police Department in case our union decided to ask them to arrest us. It was and still is the only rank and file led rally we know of to ever have been planned at the Chicago District Council in our union's history. By the end of the rainy night, nearly two hundred carpenters assembled in downtown Chicago and raised enough noise to get the retirement age reduced from 62 to 61. This campaign continues today and by our estimates will see the age of retirement reduced again this year to 60. To the bosses overseeing our daily work it means next to nothing, but to a carpenter toiling for over thirty years in one of the most dangerous industries around, it has become a real hope for a healthy and less painful end to their

career.

The real danger of Carpenters For A Rank And File Union is in our experience and continued demonstration that the grass roots mobilization of our union membership produces results that better the lives and working conditions of the carpenter's membership. Our leadership knows nothing if not their fear of losing control of our labor on job sites and in their halls, especially as they continue to make the contractors happy and contented with our attitudes and productivity.

Battle with their union leaders

Any advance we make is not only dangerous to our union officials and the contractors they represent, however. Within the caucus itself the real stakes of fighting a two front war with the union bureaucrats and the contractors weigh on us like a ton of lead and cause the largest amount of debate and discussion we ever address. While the striking grocery workers of the UFCW found that in order to win a real contract they would have to enter into a battle with their union leaders, the carpenters, outraged at their union officials, find that the source of their frustrations lies within the powerful contractors association. This is no small prospect as the real stakes are as large and powerful as the combined total value of Chicago's skyline. It is not uncommon for people to feel this weight and turn away from direct confrontation to fly under the radar in hopes of not being crushed.

This, unfortunately, is the state of affairs for working people today in the struggle to better their lives. It is a two - pronged attack and method of control that has evolved out of years of adaptation and adjustment, to keep labor under thumb, predictable, and profitable. The only difference between now and thirty years ago is that business leaders see no reason at all not to go entirely on the offensive. There is little grassroots opposition to their plans, and the union officials show not even a sliver of counter offensive. In weighing the balance of forces, they have concluded to take back all of the concessions to working people that we have gained in the last one hundred years. Carpenters For A Rank And File Union stands today as a small but threatening spark of real opposition to these conclusions, truly with enemies all around. Our battle has only just begun and shows all of the promise and risk that working people everywhere are being confronted with in what can only be described as class struggle. If successful, we could provide one of a million needed sparks to turn this retreat around. It is the reality that all of us are faced with today. It is the real live battle from the bottom.

Debate on the future of US unions

As a result of the continued decline of the US unions and the emergence of the 'New Unity Partnership' a debate about the future of the AFL-CIO has opened up. We reproduce a slightly abridged article from Labor Notes by William Johnson and Chris Katalik which explains the background to the debate. There is a Labor Notes web site section devoted to the discussion. Visit www.labornotes.org.

Seeking to reverse the declining fortunes of American unions, the presidents of five unions have initiated a plan for sweeping changes in the labor movement. This initiative, dubbed the New Unity Partnership (NUP), focuses on organizing strategies and centralizing the governing bodies inside the federation. The ideas driving this new plan stem from ongoing discussions and debates around how best to jump-start unions in the United States.

The density debate

Late last year, SEIU Director of Building Services Stephen Lerner drafted a document titled "Three Steps to Reorganizing and Rebuilding the Labor Movement." Lerner argued that declining union density is the key problem facing the US labor movement today. "Density, the percentage of the total workforce, sector of the economy, industry or labor market that is unionized is critical to labor's ability not just to bargain effectively but also to organize on scale in the private sector."

Lerner proposed that organized labor "consolidate into large sectoral/industry unions that have the resources and focus to unite millions of workers." But carving up new jurisdictions of existing members and unorganized workers seemed possibly undemocratic and certainly unworkable. Who would decide where to draw the new lines? And would members be given any say in the matter?

The NUP appears to have such a reorganization in mind, and most union members could only have learned about it by reading a September 15 Business Week article. Business Week describes the NUP as a "mini labor federation," designed by and composed of the Service Employees Union, the Hotel and Restaurant Employees, UNITE, the Laborers Union, and the Carpenters Union.

Four of these unions are in the AFL-CIO. The fifth, the Carpenters, left the federation in 2001 due to allegations of building trades raiding and other jurisdictional issues.

According to SEIU President Stern, the unions will begin to hire staff for the NUP on a temporary basis. This staffing up signals that the partnership is moving from informal discussion to a real organizational form. Long-term plans for the NUP are still not clear and may not be known until late 2004.

In a Business Week interview published online, Stern states that while radical changes to the AFL-CIO are likely necessary, they should not be forced until after the 2004 presidential elections.

Internal NUP documents titled "AFL-CIO Agenda for Change" and "Union Growth Partnership," reveal that the architects of the NUP have already begun redrawing jurisdictional lines for organizing the unorganized, presumably without the input of the AFL-CIO and other unions. Some of the proposals are logical: the Carpenters and Laborers, for instance, would focus on organizing within the construction sector. Similarly, proposed alliances that would unite participating unions in bargaining and organizing efforts with common employers or industries are welcome and needed.

Other proposals, however, such as assigning non-food retail workers to UNITE, seem problematic. Since retail has traditionally been seen as the United Food and Commercial Worker's jurisdiction, one wonders how and why the NUP has chosen UNITE, the garment and needle-trades union, to take over organizing much of retail.

Another way that the unions might seek to redraw jurisdictional boundaries would be through raiding. An internal SEIU document from 2002, titled "Options for Working with Labor Partners toward a New Labor Movement," reveals two courses of action being considered by the international: "Actively violate Article XX/XXI" and "Organize in other unions' jurisdiction."

Centralising the AFL-CIO

The NUP's plans for local labor bodies look equally problematic. According to internal documents, the partnership has discussed plans to "drastically consolidate" central labor councils, or "make them a part of State Federations." The AFL-CIO would appoint full-time Officers for CLC's, while the labor council president's position would be reduced to part-time. Further, state federations and CLC's would no longer be funded directly by local unions, but would instead rely on funds from the AFL-CIO.

Stern recently told Business Week that he's seeking to "revolutionize" the AFL-CIO, partly through "constitutional changes." Another signal that the NUP may push for more centralized authority within the AFL-CIO is an item from the "Agenda for Change" entitled "Review All AFL-CIO Charters": "Evaluate all affiliates charters to determine performance in their assigned jurisdiction, and their ability to grow/represent workers in their AFL-CIO granted charter." Lerner asserted that "the majority of unions are too weak to organize and win." Another item on the NUP's agenda is increasing the "approval of mergers."

What would happen to unions that don't meet

the NUP's standards when their charters were reviewed? Similarly, how would the NUP plan deal with smaller independent unions that the NUP sees as "external threats?"

The NUP plan also includes replacing the AFL-CIO's Organizing Department with a "Strategic Growth Department," and reducing or eliminating the AFL-CIO's Education, Field Mobilization, Health and Safety, and Civil and Human Rights Departments.

The NUP presidents have shown an apparent willingness to work with anti-union politicians. Last summer, Stern, O'Sullivan, and Wilhelm urged fellow union officials to "follow their example by giving \$1,000 or more to the re-election campaign of Dennis Hastert." Hastert, a Republican and currently Speaker of the House, is a longtime foe of unions. Most recently, he fought hard to make sure the House passed a bill slashing workers' overtime benefits. In an article in this September's *The American Prospect*, Harold Meyerson noted that Stern, Wilhelm, McCarron, and O'Sullivan all bought tables at a recent Republican Congressional Campaign Committee dinner.

Now, the NUP has listed meeting with Karl Rove-President Bush's key strategist-as one of their first political objectives. At the same time, Stern told Business Week that defeating Bush in the 2004 elections is the AFL-CIO's "main role right now, and it should be."

Law of the Jungle

Labor Notes unequivocally supports thoughtful, impassioned, inclusive debate about organizing strategies. That leaders of the five unions behind the NUP are thinking long and hard about how best to organize the unorganized is a positive sign. They need now, however, to think about the best way for this strategizing to take place. Five men sitting around a table cannot determine the future of the labor movement, nor decide who will and won't be included in this future.

The quality and characteristics of an organizing drive shape the way a union functions once the drive is over. Likewise, the character of these organizing debates will determine the way the labor movement as a whole functions in years to come. Organizing is important. Density is important. But these are just two variables in a complex equation that adds up to workers power. Democracy, militancy, and a broader social movement orientation will all be essential components in a revival of the US labor movement's fortunes.

If debates over labor's future are inclusive and democratic, there is reason to be hopeful. If they are exclusive and secretive, we will end up with the law of the jungle. Big unions will push out the smaller because they can. Raiding will be rampant. Constitutional changes will be made to suit the needs of those in power.

Israeli authorities seek to dismantle WAC

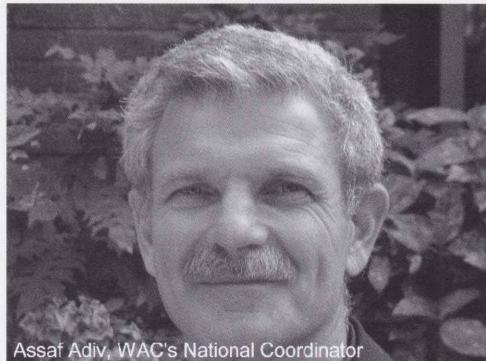
In previous issues of **SOLIDARITY** we have reported on the state harassment of the Workers Advice Centers. The 'investigation' by the Registrar of Non-Profit Associations has now been produced and the future of WAC as an independent organisation is under threat. It is appealing for support from trade union and other organisations to defend it against what is a political witch hunt designed to close it down, or impose a 'chaperone' who would compromise its independence. Below is a press release from WAC.

The Registrar of Non-Profit Associations (NPA's) in Israel, Attorney Yaron Kedar, has decided to dismantle the Workers Advice Center (WAC, referred to as Ma'an in Arabic and Hebrew). He claims that WAC has not been acting in accordance with its stated goals: to defend workers' rights. Rather, he says, "The NPA acted in cooperation with other NPA's to advance the interests of the political party known as the ODA" (the Organization for Democratic Action or Da'am in Arabic). He states, in particular, that WAC has served as a conduit of funds to the ODA.

WAC rejects these claims. Since its registration as an NPA in the year 2000, it has been devoting all its energy and resources to advance the interests of under-represented workers, especially Arabs, by organizing them into work teams, finding them jobs with construction companies, and representing them in their battles with Israeli bureaucracy. All of WAC's financial records were provided to the Registrar. He did not find a single shekel that went from WAC, or through WAC, to the ODA.

Why then has he decided to dismantle WAC?

The story begins with the former Registrar, Amiram Boget. He attempted to deny registration to WAC. In May 2000 a Jerusalem court forced him to go through with it. One year later, however, Boget undertook an investigation on the pretext that "WAC is not fulfilling the goals for which it was established, and it is serving as camouflage for political activity." The spur was a complaint, but Boget refused to divulge who made it. With the release of the investigative report, the source has at last been revealed. The complaint stemmed from a disgruntled former employee who had lost a personal lawsuit against WAC. After giving false testimony, he received permission from the Registrar to found a rival NPA.



Assaf Adiv, WAC's National Coordinator

The Registrar's investigator, in his report, cannot help but acknowledge that WAC carried on "energetic activity in the field of job placement," but he goes on to say that the hidden purpose of this activity has been to advance the ODA. The hidden purpose? If it is hidden, then how does the Registrar know about it? Or is it no longer hidden? Has he brought the hidden purpose to light? But if so, why does he show no evidence? Apparently, WAC's purpose is still hidden, like the WMD in Iraq!

In the investigative report we read that WAC, as well as other NPA's it cooperates with, "were established and operated by central activists in the ODA party." So what? The law permits a person to be active both in a political party and in an NPA. The ODA is legal. But the Registrar has certain persons in mind. In the 1980's, these persons were accused of contact with the PLO, and some sat in prison as a result. That is the nub of the vendetta. In the report we read the following sentence: "As communicated to me, these activists stem from 'Derekh Hanitzot...'" The investigator then mentions them by name. The Registrar's investigator does not say what possible relevance this can have. Rather, he conveys a subliminal message: such people should not be allowed to take part in an NPA.

As for the ideational connection between WAC and the ODA, no one has ever denied its existence. Such a connection in no way contravenes the Law of NPA's. All the political parties in Israel maintain ideational connections, if not more, with NPA's.

As a public body, WAC belongs to its hundreds of members, and they alone have the right to determine the makeup of its institutions.

WAC's members today include more than 600 workers. It is open to all, without regard to nationality, gender, religious

belief or political tendency. It is run by the workers together with its field coordinators in a spirit of cooperation and equality between Arab and Jewish members. The leaders are chosen in democratic elections. Some of them are identified indeed with a socialist orientation, but this fact is subject to the will of the membership. The members, and only they, have the right to determine who will serve in the leadership. They and only they have the right to determine WAC's policies and agenda. When the Registrar attempts to interfere with this process, he violates the basic rights of all WAC members.

In the last four years, WAC has signed wage agreements with fifteen construction companies, among them the largest in Israel. It has ensured jobs for hundreds of Israeli citizens. It is represented on a regular basis in the discussions of the Knesset Committee on Migrant Workers. It is recognized as a representative body by the Employment Service and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

The vendetta has a broader context, as revealed in a study by the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), headed by Professor Yitzhak Galnoor. This study warns against over-interference on the part of the authorities, especially the Registrar of NPA's, in the affairs of NPA's that work for social change and that often find themselves, as a result, in confrontation with the government. Galnoor devotes a chapter to the relation between the Registrar and NPA's that work in the Arab sector. He finds a clear negative bias.

WAC's harassment should also be seen against the background of the socio-economic situation in Israel today. The government has slashed social welfare in recent years, pushing tens of thousands outside the network of social security. The towns of the periphery, and especially the Arab villages, have undergone social and economic devastation. Given its neo-liberal agenda, the government pursues organizations like WAC, which demand justice for the deprived and neglected.

WAC has opened a public campaign in Israel and abroad, insisting on its right to organize workers.

WAC has no intention of rolling over backwards and yielding to the Registrar's decree.

It has relations of solidarity and cooperation with labor unions throughout

the world. We shall turn to these unions, including the International Labor Organization (ILO). The "Convention concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, Convention:C087," effective since 1950 which Israel joined in 1957 obliges all member states to grant freedom of organization to their workers, including the freedom to determine the internal regulations of their organizations, their plan of operations, and the choice of their leadership, as they see fit, without interference from the government.

WAC calls on all human-rights organizations, and on all who care about freedom of organization and freedom of speech in Israel, to join its struggle against the vendetta of the Registrar of NPA's.

For all the material relating to this case, including a background article you can visit WAC's web site:

www.workersadvicecenter.org

Or you can download the information in RTF format from the **SOLIDARITY** web site at:



http://uk.geocities.com/solidarity_magazine

International support for WAC

The Spanish trade union federation, the CCOO, is supporting WAC. It has written to the Israeli Ambassador in Spain and is pursuing the issue with the ILO.

Visit their web site at:

www.observatoriodeltrabajo.org

The General Secretary of the **Palestinian General Federation of Trades Unions** Shaher Sa'ad has written in support:

"We are shocked to hear the news about the Registrar's decision to close down WAC (MA'AN). WAC is a very important organization and is known for its open hand to everyone who approaches it... We stand firmly with you in defending the principles of justice and democracy. We are sure you are going to win."

The Italian Engineering union, FIOM, an affiliate of the CGIL, has raised protests.

Flood them with Protest Messages!

Take part in WAC's campaign by doing one or more of the following:

Let WAC Get On with its Work! Do not shut down the Workers Advice Center (WAC MA'AN)!

We the undersigned oppose the decision by the Registrar of Non-Profit Associations to dismantle WAC MA'AN, the Workers Advice Center. WAC is an active association that has distinguished itself in recent years not only by finding jobs for unemployed Arab workers, but also by placing their issue on the public agenda. We see the decision to abolish WAC as a severe blow to freedom of organization in Israel. We call on the authorities to stop interfering in WAC's important mission of promoting workers' rights.

The Registrar's decision contravenes a Basic Law of Israel, Human Dignity and Liberty (1992): the decision would keep the members of WAC from exercising their freedom to organize for social goals.

The Registrar claims, without foundation, that WAC's activities do not match its declared purposes and that it serves as a front for a political party, the Organization for Democratic Action. WAC's successes in placing workers testify to the contrary. At present, 600 workers, along with their families, depend on WAC's activity. The Registrar's arbitrary step constitutes a direct blow to these people. It also contravenes Convention C 87 of the International Labour Organization, to which Israel is a signatory, and which assures the right of workers to organize without governmental interference.

We call on the Minister of Justice, Mr. Yosef Lapid, to instruct the Registrar to stop at once the procedures against the Workers Advice Center, WAC MA'AN.

Sign this petition

Email your name and any trade union position you hold (if signing in an individual capacity), or that of your organisation if it is signing, to solidarity@btinternet.com
We can send you copies of the petition.

- Send protest letters to the Israeli Embassy / Consulate in your Country
- Organize a protest in front of the local Israeli Embassy / Consulate
Send protest letters to the Israeli Authorities:

1. **Mr. Aharon Abramovich** - General Director, Ministry of Justice POB 49049 Jerusalem 91490 / Fax: +972-2-6287757 / Email to: mancal@justice.gov.il

2. **Mr. Meni Mazuz** – Attorney General of Israel, Ministry of Justice, c/o Foreign Relations : Fax: 972-2- 6261862 / Email to: ForeignR@justice.gov.il

3. **Attorney Yaron Kedar** - The Registrar of NPAs in Israel
POB 95464 Jerusalem 91999 Israel / Fax: +972-2-6546671

4. **Mr Ra'anana Dinur** – General Director Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor . Fax +972-2-5600300.
Email to: dinur.r@moital.gov.il

5. **Attorney Shlomo Yitzhaki** – Head of Labor Relations Dept., Ministry of Labor (Israeli Gov. Representative to the ILO).
Email to: shlomo@moital.gov.il

6. **MK Ran Cohen** – Head of Knesset Special Committee on Migrant Workers.
Fax +972-2-6496166.
Mail to: rancohen@knesset.gov.il

Behind the COSATU-ANC row over Zimbabwe

The expulsion of a COSATU delegation from Zimbabwe by the Mugabe government created a big row between the ANC and COSATU. The South African government issued a statement effectively accepting the right of Mugabe to expel members of COSATU, the ANC's Alliance partner. The row deepened with a stinging attack from a leader of the ANC Youth League who expressed the view that the differences over Zimbabwe mirror differences over the Mbeki government's economic policy at home. Below we reproduce the reply of COSATU General Secretary Zwelinzima Vavi to that article.

The article in ANC Today, on 12 November 2004, entitled "Signalling left, turning right" signed by Fikile Mbalula, President of the ANC Youth League, raises some very serious questions for the Alliance.

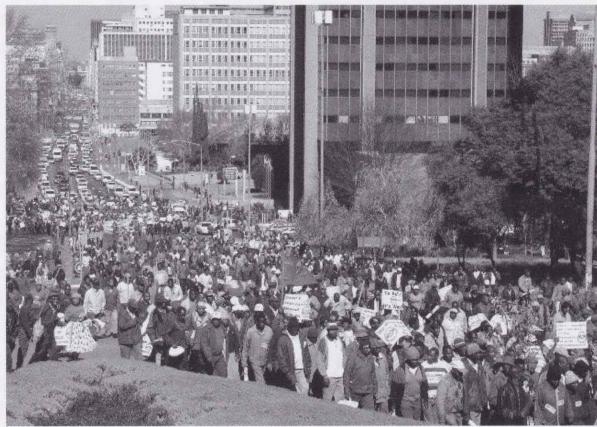
The article represents the worst kind of childish, schoolboy misrepresentation of facts. The extensive use of quotes in order to insinuate that COSATU criticises Zimbabwe from the same standpoint as right-wing personalities and media smacks of a narrow point-scoring mentality that does not belong in mature, principled and constructive debates between comrades.

Misrepresentation of the facts

Handling differences in a manner that seeks to rubbish opponents through misrepresentation of facts, in order to feed paranoid fears is the worst form of engagement. The article is such a sad piece of work that its author should be ashamed of himself.

One of the critical lessons that we had hoped the author had learned from the 2001/2 tensions in the Alliance is that whilst all of us have a right to disagree with one another but no one has a right to question the bona fides of, or cast aspersions on, the other Alliance partners. Unfortunately the Mbalula article is a systematic attempt to do just that. Regrettably he does so on behalf of the ANC, that has a responsibility to lead the Alliance towards a more constructive engagement and more constructive management of differences at the public level.

COSATU has never supported a regime change in Zimbabwe in the manner that the article seeks to misrepresent. In fact, the only reason we don't consider suing for



defamation is that the article is too childish for a serious response. Besides, most of the ANC's members are workers and the poor, and should not pay the price of poor judgment by some of its leaders. The article does point to the need for the Alliance to develop a common understanding on what is actually happening in Zimbabwe. Maybe the Alliance must send a joint fact finding mission to Zimbabwe so that we can read from the same page.

All along, we thought the differences between COSATU and the government were over tactics. We thought we all agreed that there is a serious political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe that demands an intervention to assist that country out of the quagmire.

Ideological defence of ZANU-PF

Now, however, this author comes up with a radically different perspective. His article is not a defence of government's attempt to reach a diplomatic solution, but an ideological defence of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF government and a denial that there are any serious problems in the country.

We never knew until now that the real issue raised by the situation in Zimbabwe is the need to defend South Africa's 'Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy' (GEAR), which every left intellectual worth his or her salt agrees was a discredited neo-liberal programme premised on the prescriptions of the IMF and the World Bank. Who is truly signalling left and turning right?

The article suggests that anyone who opposed the GEAR must have favoured totally irresponsible fiscal and monetary strategies. This is the type of misrepresentation and woeful discrediting of the opponents views, which is aimed at closing the space for a rational dialogue

and debate. Only those who have something to hide stoop to this level and twist facts.

Misrepresenting COSATU's position to suggest that we were pushing our government in the direction of an economic crisis, comparable to Zimbabwe's, is the kind of cheap propaganda that you would expect from students at a higher-primary school debate trying to outsmart each other in a class debate to impress a schoolmaster.

The ANC and the South African government have embarked on a policy of diplomacy over Zimbabwe. COSATU fully supports these efforts. However COSATU is not a government but a trade union and a civil society formation. Unlike the government, it has no diplomatic channels through which to raise its concerns, and its protest letters go unanswered.

Global Solidarity

COSATU has obligations of solidarity towards workers. COSATU must, and will continue to, speak out every time workers in Zimbabwe or anywhere else ask us to do so, or when we believe the situation demands that we speak out. In this process, we have a responsibility to our members and to the international labour movement to act in a manner we would expect them to act if we faced similar challenges. Trade unions are a product of global solidarity and can only survive if they receive and provide global solidarity. That is why one of the founding principles of COSATU is international solidarity. The international slogan and motto of workers is an injury to one is an injury to all.

We believe that these approaches - government diplomacy and trade union and civil society solidarity - are complementary rather than contradictory. Diplomatic initiatives will be more effective if there is also public activity on the ground to highlight the problems and dangers that Zimbabwe workers faces.

Surely it is not a problem for civil society groups to speak out against the routine beatings, arrests and harassment of workers in Zimbabwe. Why then did the author feel compelled to surf websites to find statements on Zimbabwe by right-wingers around the world just so that he could argue that COSATU is somehow in cahoots with these forces?

To ensure a proper, open and comradely debate in the Alliance, we need clarity

from the ANC leadership.

Do they agree with the author of the ANC Today piece that the Mugabe government still represents a progressive national liberation movement? Should the ANC's diplomatic efforts be directed towards defending it and strengthening it against imperialist interests? Should it therefore engage all other forces in Zimbabwe from the perspective that opponents of ZANU-PF's disastrous policies must be agents of imperialism?

Or does it agree that the violence directed against government critics represents the kind of intolerance and repression that have plunged many parts of the world into bloody conflicts?

Does it agree that routine disregard of court orders constitutes an attack on the rule of law and the principle of separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary that underpins all democracies?

Arrest of labour leaders

Does it agree that the frequent arrest, torture and harassment of labour leaders and restraining of trade union activities represents an attack on basic human rights?

Does it agree or not that the current electoral process in Zimbabwe contravenes SADC electoral guidelines and that it does not satisfy the conditions for free and fair elections set by the South Africa Observer Mission to Zimbabwe? Does it agree or not that holding elections under conditions contrary to these guidelines would deepen the political crisis of Zimbabwe, hence the need to speed up interventions?

Does it support the chaotic nature of the Zimbabwe land reform that ended up with the government leaders having more than one farm whilst peasants and workers remain trapped in landlessness and grinding poverty?

Does the ANC support the Public Order Security Act of 2004, requiring unions and all others to seek police permission if they hold workshops or meetings of more than five people? Would the ANC leadership feel comfortably seeking police permission and submitting their agenda to the local station commander when they meet every Monday as a group of six officials?

Do the leadership support the current bills being pioneered in the Zimbabwe Parliament that would stop unions and civil society from receiving any money from outside the country in pursuance of their work, and deny them the right to comment on anything that is under the

administration of government?

Does the leadership not agree that results from the last elections were controversial and have only helped to further polarise Zimbabwe society, and that this type of mistake must be avoided in future in order to maintain the legitimacy and integrity of the elections process and therefore democracy itself as envisaged by NEPAD?

Does it agree or not that the Zimbabwe Constitution is flawed, in particular the clause that allows the President to appoint 20 out of 150 MPs up front before elections, and that this clause should be changed?

Finally, does Mbalula accept that an unemployment rate of 75% to 80% indicates a massive attack on the living standards of the poor? Does he not agree that shrinkage of more than 20% of the economy and inflation of over 300% a year constitutes a major economic crisis?

Does he agree that the estimated 3 million Zimbabweans living in South Africa and the total estimated 5 million in the Diaspora from a population of 12 million are mostly economic refugees who would prefer to work in Zimbabwe and closer to their families?

If the situation is normal and all that is needed is to defend Zimbabwe against the imperialists' hy is diplomacy on the cards at all? Of course most ANC leaders would agree that the diplomatic intervention is premised on the need to help Zimbabwe out of its crisis.

A foretaste for South Africa?

Mbalula must take his head out of the sand. The childishness displayed in his irrational defence of what is clearly wrong is shocking. Mbalula's words are a chilling warning that events in Zimbabwe could be a foretaste of what could happen in South Africa, if the author had his way.

Civil society groups and trade unions could be accused of guilt by association with imperialist forces, which would then be the pretext for the sort of attacks on human rights we see in Zimbabwe.

The only buffer to prevent such a scenario is a strong ANC, SACP and COSATU and our democratic and progressive constitution. If they fail to protect us, then God help us all! Thanks to our struggle, however, Mbalula and other like-minded people will never have the unfettered power President Mugabe has in Zimbabwe.

Telcom Shares Scandal

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the Communications Workers Union (CWU) reject suggestions in the media that they have different views on the proposed purchase of a 15.1% stake in Telkom by the Public Investment Commissioners (PIC).

COSATU and the CWU are at one in deplored the fact that the PIC, which manages the pension fund for public sector employees, has spent R6.6 billion of workers' money without any consultation with the unions or staff, in a project - the privatization of Telkom - to which the majority of the unions are opposed. The CWU and COSATU have consistently opposed Telkom's privatization and support its renationalisation.

While both the federation and the union have demanded that the sale of Telkom shares to the foreign-owned Thintana consortium be reversed, they are equally angry at the way in which this is being done. Workers' pensions money is being used to oil the wheels of an already discredited deal which will make a small number of people very rich and which has raised serious questions about the involvement of former and current public officials. The hard-earned money of the poor is being used to facilitate a deal which will pour millions of rands into the pockets of the very rich. It is an outrage!

The CWU has reiterated that it fully supports the restructuring of the telecommunications, Information and Communication Technology industry, as outlined in the ICT sector summit agreement, particularly the participation of the historically underprivileged people and the enforcement of the social dialogue that will ensure the attainment of the social and economic development and equity. This deal however does nothing to advance us towards this goal.

The case for renationalisation has been further strengthened by the announcements this week by Telkom that it has made a gigantic R2.8 billion profit, 66.5 % higher than last year, and it is increasing its tariffs so that, yet again, the cost of local calls, used mainly by poorer customers, will increase by 5.5% while the cost of long distance calls will decrease by 10% and the cost of international calls, used overwhelmingly by business, will drop by 28%.

Telkom must be taken back into state ownership, its retrenchment plans scrapped and run as an efficient, affordable service for the people, and not as a device for amassing huge profits for a small minority.

Bid for a real union at the Mirror

Journalists at the Mirror group in London have made an unprecedented legal move to get rid of an unpopular rival union so they can be represented by the NUJ.

On October 15 a 75-strong petition was presented to the Central Arbitration Committee in support of an application to "derecognise" the British Association of Journalists at Mirror Group Newspapers. The Central Arbitration Committee is the government agency responsible for overseeing the recognition of unions in the workplace.

The date was the third anniversary of the BAJ's bargaining agreement with the company and the first chance for NUJ members to challenge it.

The BAJ is now thought to have fewer than 100 members at the Mirror. The NUJ has a lot more, it believes especially if the associated sports daily, the Racing Post is included. The NUJ has 80 members on that title alone and the BAJ has none.

The BAJ secured recognition in a ballot organised by the CAC, and NUJ members were advised by their union to support it, on the grounds that any union was better than none. Since then there have been waves of redundancies that journalists feel the BAJ has not resisted. It has also failed to secure good agreements on pay.

Now the CAC is considering whether to order a workplace ballot to gauge the support, or lack of it, for the BAJ. If this goes ahead and the BAJ loses, the NUJ would immediately launch its own claim for recognition.

The BAJ was founded as a breakaway from the NUJ by Steve Turner, a one-time General Secretary of the NUJ who was sacked in 1991. He is a former union leader at the Mirror, and BAJ membership has been strongly concentrated on the group. But many of its active members have left since the BAJ won recognition.

In the three years of the agreement, there have been three waves of job losses -- two on The People and one on the Mirror. In 2001, the number of journalists in the "bargaining unit" was 553. It is now 494, a net loss of 59. The agreement covers the Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror and The People not the Racing Post, where management have a separate agreement with the BAJ, even though it has not a single member.

The voluntary agreement with the BAJ at the Racing Post was rushed through by managers last year as the NUJ was about to achieve formal recognition. When the NUJ challenged this deal at the CAC, Steve Turner gave evidence for the company.

The "derecognition" bid is the first the CAC

has had in the four years since the Employment Relations Act, which governs union recognition, came into force.

It was submitted by Terry Lloyd, a sub on The People and treasurer of the NUJ Canary Wharf branch. He said:

"The BAJ has been a disaster for Mirror Group journalists. But, more than anything, this application is about democracy and giving journalists a say about which union they want to represent them."

Driving Up Standards Together

We reproduce below a joint statement by the British TGWU and the US SEIU.

More and more workers find that their jobs -- and the services they deliver -- are threatened by global corporations that move around the world looking to exploit cheap labour, privatise public services, and drive down pay and benefit standards.

In the bus industry, UK-based First Group and National Express preach "corporate social responsibility" in the United Kingdom, while actively campaigning against union organization in the United States. Many employees of First Student, First Group's US subsidiary, are paid near poverty wages and most are not provided affordable health care coverage.

The Service Employees International Union and the Transport and General Workers Union have formed a transatlantic partnership to hold FirstGroup and National Express accountable to their employees and consumers.

The two companies, which do business in the United States under the names First Student and Durham Student Services, are the second and third largest private bus companies, respectively, in the United States.

In the United Kingdom, consumers are increasingly frustrated by the state of transport services. According to a new national opinion poll by MORI Research:

67 percent of National Express bus users in the United Kingdom think that services are no better or have gotten worse in the last five years.

Nearly two-thirds of all bus passengers believe that bus companies put profits before customers' needs.

In the United States, First Student and Durham are engaged in a race to the bottom lowering standards and treating their US workforce far differently than employees who do the same work in the United Kingdom. Both companies have a history of running aggressive anti-union campaigns at their US operations as they attempt to prevent employees from joining together to win

improvements.

Unions play a critical role in protecting US workers since they do not enjoy some of the basic workplace standards that Europeans possess by law. Without a union, workers often have no employment contract, go without access to affordable health care, do not receive sick pay, holiday pay, or maternity pay, have no bargaining rights with their employers, and may be fired at will.

Despite public "corporate responsibility" pronouncements by First Group that reflect favorably upon unions, the company's US subsidiary First Student is aggressively anti-union:

In its 2003-04 "Corporate Responsibility Report" First Group writes: "We have developed strong partnerships with our trade unions at both local and national levels, leading to joint working across a range of issues, including education, staff welfare, and employee benefits."

The First Student US employee handbook includes a "Union Free" section which states: "First Student will vigorously oppose any attempt by a union to organize our employees...." As First Student employees have begun to mobilize around issues such as fairness, pay, benefits and scheduling, the company has responded by ratcheting up its anti-union activities:

In a recent SEIU survey of First Student employees around the United States, 95 percent said that the company's health care plan was unaffordable, or poor and in need of improvement.

In Florida, First Student recently sent to employees three letters denigrating unions and encouraging workers to refuse to sign a union card if asked to do so by co-workers or union organizers.

First Student recently held a training session in Florida in which company managers were encouraged to stop unionization among their employees. One document given to First Student managers stated: "Unions no longer serve any useful purpose. Their time has passed."

The poor labour standards practiced by First Student, which are unfortunately a hallmark of large swaths of the US economy, should be a warning light for European workers. Unless the low standards and anti-worker practices of multinationals are challenged in the United States, they will increasingly be exported to Europe's more progressive economies.

UNISON/Verdi Memorandum Of understanding

UNISON and Ver.di, respectively Britain and Germany's biggest unions, today announced that they will co-ordinate key aspects of their work.

The two unions have been working together for a number of months through a series of joint meetings. Dave Prentis, General Secretary of UNISON, and Frank Bsirske, President of Ver.di, have met on various occasions in order to discuss means and areas of co-operation. These meetings have been backed up by meetings of other officers. In addition to joint working at the European Public Service Union (EPSU) and at Public Services International (PSI) the two unions have organised a joint seminar at this weekend's European Social Forum. A further joint seminar on the Future of Public Services is planned for early next year. The intention is to develop these contacts into a more formal relationship.

The two unions, whose members are largely recruited from the public service providers, believe that they have a great deal in common and that by working more closely together they can considerably enhance the conditions of workers in both the private and public sector. The two unions will also work more closely on a range of policy issues, particularly at the European level. And they intend to undertake joint action in a number of transnational companies engaged in the provision of public services where the two unions have members.

While one element of the future co-operative working will be around developing common policies for public services there will also be a number of practical elements. These will include joint recruitment activity, joint negotiating and bargaining and joint campaigning. Other points of the Memorandum of Understanding include:

- Pursuing joint strategies to engage with private companies, especially through European Works Councils where both unions are represented. These include Sodexho, ISS, Veolia (Vivendi) Severn Trent RWE/Thames and Innogy;
- Working jointly to set up EWCs in companies that don't yet have them;
- In transnationals where UNISON and Ver.di have members, working together on compiling comparative data around pay and conditions between British and German staff, pursuing joint collective bargaining strategies using the above and undertaking joint recruitment campaigns;
- Co-ordinated lobbying of respective national governments and European institutions on matters of common interest;
- Examining the possibilities and potential benefits of reciprocal membership arrangements and allowing members to automatically transfer their union membership if they take a job in another country;
- Extending twinning arrangements between the unions at local and regional level. (A

twinning agreement between UNISON's Greater London Region and Ver.di's Berlin/Brandenburg region has recently been initiated)

- Regular meetings between senior UNISON and Ver.di officers both to review progress of the Memorandum and to examine ways in which it can be extended.

FBU AGS Election

The results of the nominations for the Assistant General Secretary's position were: John McGhee 175, Matt Wrack 159, Dean Mills 82.

McGhee is the apparatus man, whose picture has been much reproduced in the union journals of late, together with the odd article, entirely coincidentally, of course.

Mills, was the man who abstained on the vote in the EC in which Grassroots FBU was banned. His supporters having been pushing the line that Matt Wrack did not have the breadth of support that Dean was likely to have!

Given the fact that the candidates are not allowed to canvass, a position which obviously is to the advantage of national officers, Matt's nominations are pretty good. If Mills had not put himself forward Matt would almost certainly have had more nominations than McGhee.

The question now is will Mills step down in favour of the candidate who has the best chance of beating McGhee? Or will he stand and risk splitting the vote and letting the apparatus man win?

However, even if Mills refuses to stand down, the argument that a vote for Mills risks letting in one of the people responsible for the debacle of the dispute, will surely carry weight with a membership which has contempt for the Gilchrist clique. The outcome is liable to be determined by whether or not sufficient members can be persuaded that the result does matter. The leadership will no doubt be using the method of the smear to try and stop Matt winning. However, after their 'leadership' of the dispute it is debatable whether 'Stop Matt Wrack' will be a sufficient rallying cry to mobilise the membership.

UNISON General Secretary Election

Three candidates have received the required number of nominations to stand for election as general secretary of UNISON: Dave Prentis, current general secretary, Roger Banister, NEC member for the North West, and Jon Rogers, NEC member for London.

Banister has been nominated by 30 branches,

Prentis by 524 branches, seven service groups, nine regional councils and the national executive council and Rogers by 50 branches and one regional council.

Ballot papers will go out to members on the 25th January 2005 and the closing date for the ballot is 28th February. The result will be announced on the 9 March 2005.

Such a weight of nominations for Prentis does not necessarily reflect the level of support from the membership, so much as the effort of the union apparatus.

The onus is surely on Roger Bannister to step down in order not to split the left vote, which would give Prentis an easy victory.

Split in Amicus NEC left

In late October the Amicus NEC Left Unity Gazette caucus voted to expel four of its members. Their 'crime' was voting against endorsing General Secretary Derek Simpson's repudiation of Amicus construction workers who were involved in the Wembley Stadium dispute. Amicus members subsequently won their dispute, despite the repudiation and the actions of Amicus full time officials who escorted scabs across the picket lines!

The caucus voted twelve to six to expel four of their members (all of whom are members of the Socialist Workers' Party) for "breaking discipline". Two other members, although not expelled, have since chosen to exclude themselves from the caucus. The result is that the original 23 Gazette supporters elected a year ago are now reduced to 15, with six left NEC members now acting independently.

At its meeting on 2nd November, London Region Amicus Unity Gazette called the expulsion of the four NEC members to be rescinded. It appears that discussions are taking place to try to heal the rift. However, a proposal has been brought forward to introduce a standing order for the NEC which would ban members expressing disagreements with decisions with which they disagreed.

"Once a decision has been made by the NEC collectively, the individual members of the NEC... shall accordingly support that decision and shall make no statement, nor take any action, which is likely to have the effect of undermining or repudiating that NEC decision."

There are other worrying signs. A document presented to the NEC on December 14th proposes to rationalise branches, automatically placing members in geographical branches nearest to their home, breaking up the industrial structure.

A Unity Gazette national meeting has also voted to end the regional structure of the steering committee which had been negotiated between the AEEU Gazette and the MSF Unity left group.

Unions should oppose ID cards

Jon Rogers writes in a personal capacity about the importance of trade union opposition to ID cards. We reproduce this from the

UNISON United Left web site:
www.uul.ukshells.co.uk/uul/html/



Senior Home Office bureaucrats have been trying to persuade successive Governments to adopt identity cards for decades.

Unfortunately, this Labour Government has now fallen for this nonsense, and is preparing a right-wing populist campaign in which identity cards will be a central feature.

Once more this is policy making for electoral convenience. As with the disgraceful announcement of civil service job cuts by the Chancellor, so the Home Secretary's reactionary shopping list of bills in the Queen's Speech is intended primarily to spike the Tories' guns, this time winning over that old Thatcherite favourite "Laura Norder" to New Labour's cause.

We are now heading into an election under the shadow of fears which the Government is stoking up so that it can offer us solutions. ID cards have been just such a "solution" waiting patiently for a "problem" for many years.

There are practical as well as civil liberties reasons to reject the proposals for a National Identity Register (NIR). These were dramatically underlined in the week of the Queen's Speech when it became clear that much of the Department for Work and Pensions had been unable to operate for several days owing to a crashed

computer system. Central government's record of being sold expensive, poor-performing computer systems by wealthy multinationals does not suggest that the NIR would be efficient or cost-effective, even if it had a worthy purpose. Which it does not.

David Blunkett, of course, claims that the NIR, and the ID cards which he will have the power to introduce, will help to combat identity theft, fraud and illegal migration. Attempts will certainly be made to suggest that somehow they will also help to combat terrorism. A little thought is enough to show how far away this is from evidence-based policymaking.

www.No2ID.net
Stop ID cards and the database state

Certainly, there is no evidence that those nations with compulsory identity cards are free from the evils from which the Home Secretary hopes that the NIR will protect us.

Giving the state the authority to keep all our details on a comprehensive database, which will provide the infrastructure for future compulsory identity cards, fundamentally shifts the relationship between the state and the individual in an authoritarian direction.

As citizens, all of us will have our privacy invaded on an unprecedented scale, and those most often on the receiving end of discrimination from the state will face new hazards.

However, as workers, many trade unionists will also be expected to check identities on the NIR and potentially to exclude people

from access to public services if they don't check out. This is not what union members signed up for when they came to work in public services, and it isn't something which we should stand for.

We need investment in improving public services, not investment in computerised intrusion. Our members have enough to do in delivering those services without taking on new gatekeeper roles in pursuit of the pointless ID card scheme.

Opposition to ID cards cannot be allowed to become seen as an issue of concern only to the "chattering classes" or to well-meaning Guardian readers. The trade unions need to mobilise our members to oppose the National Identity Register, up to and including supporting workers who refuse to cooperate with the imposition of additional duties around the use of ID cards to deny access to public services.

Before, during and after the forthcoming general election campaign, the trade unions need to be at the forefront of the fight against ID cards.

No2ID campaign

NO2ID is a campaigning organisation opposed to the government's planned ID card and the National Identity Register.

We bring together individuals and organisations from all sections of the community and seek to ensure that the case against identity is forcefully put forward in the media, in the corridors of power and at grassroots level.

We hope to defeat the Home Secretary's proposals in Parliament, but will continue our campaign in the country at large even if legislation is passed.

Visit the web site at:

Like this magazine? Take out a subscription!

For £6 we will send you the next 4 issues. International subscriptions are £10 sterling. Why not get your union branch to order a bundle to distribute to shop stewards and activists?

Please send me copies of the next 4 issues I enclose £ Plus a donation of £

I/we would like to sponsor SOLIDARITY

Name/Organisation.....

Email.....

Union.....

Address.....

Please return to SOLIDARITY, PO Box 1219, Swindon SN3 2WA

Young or old



Make sure you get your copy